



Ad Astra First School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 113742
LEA Poole
Inspection number 279236
Inspection dates 22 February 2006 to 23 February 2006
Reporting inspector Michael Burghart AI

This inspection was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	First	School address	Sherborn Crescent
School category	Community		Poole
Age range of pupils	4 to 8		Dorset BH17 8AP
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01202 602113
Number on roll	385	Fax number	01202 693330
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs Mandy Durdle
Date of previous inspection	7 February 2000	Headteacher	Mrs Val Arbon

Age group 4 to 8	Inspection dates 22 February 2006 - 23 February 2006	Inspection number 279236
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a large first school serving a large estate which is a mix of privately owned and local authority housing. This area is recognised as one of the more disadvantaged in the borough of Poole. Virtually all pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is above average and varies considerably from year group to year group. The attainment of children when they first join the school is below average.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school which gives good value for money. It has many outstanding features and continues to improve. Pupils are achieving well and standards are rising. Standards are currently average but are on course to be above average by the end of the school year in Years 2 and 3. This is the result of consistently good teaching, a good curriculum and the good quality of leadership and management. Provision in Reception is outstanding, with children reaching most of what is expected nationally. The head's vision and drive to make improvements are excellent. She skilfully makes use of the contributions of the very good team of staff and governors to plan for the future. The school's self-evaluation has been systematically improved and is now outstanding. Senior leaders have an accurate view of strengths and areas for improvement. This overview closely matches inspectors' findings and shows the school has a very good capacity to improve. Parents are very happy with the school.

The school takes good care of pupils, who respond very positively with excellent behaviour and an eagerness to learn. Provision for those with learning difficulties is good. Attendance is below average, mostly as a result of parents taking pupils out for holidays in term time. Assessment in English, mathematics and science is good. It is very well documented and used effectively to modify the curriculum. However, there is more to do to develop targets and teachers' marking to show pupils how to improve their work. Plans for this are in hand, as are those to improve how staff assess pupils' performance in other subjects.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make the most of already good assessment information to identify ways in which individual pupils can improve their work.
- Develop ways to establish how well pupils are performing in subjects other than English, mathematics and science.
- Improve attendance rates.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good and standards are average. Pupils of all abilities are achieving well. Children in Reception get off to an excellent start. From below-average starting points at the beginning of Reception, children make good progress to reach, as pupils' books and school records show, broadly average standards at the end of Year 3. The school has done well to address the decline in standards in reading and mathematics shown by results over the previous three years. New initiatives in grouping pupils by ability for literacy and numeracy are having positive effects on raising standards. Predictions for this year, based on assessments already carried out, are for the school to exceed its challenging targets. The most recent information shows that standards are likely to be above average in reading, writing and mathematics, and average in science, at the end of Years 2 and 3. This indicates that weaknesses in how boys and

higher-attaining pupils perform are being addressed, particularly in reading and mathematics, and that pupils with learning difficulties do well for their abilities.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Moral development is a strength and, although there are some pupils who need behavioural support, behaviour in and around the school is outstanding. Good attention is given to multicultural development, with visitors from different cultures enhancing the curriculum and helping pupils to understand diversity and racial equality. Pupils show they enjoy school. This is evident in their outstanding attitudes, which contribute to the good progress that they make. Pupils are keen to adopt safe and healthy lifestyles and have really taken on board how to make their lunchboxes healthy. The school achieved Healthy Schools status in 2005, has an annual Health Week, and invites health professionals into school to talk to pupils. Year 3 pupils are making a good contribution to the school community through the school council and by taking part in citizenship activities. There is a good commitment to the wider community through supporting charity schemes, including Comic Relief. Pupils are developing appropriate skills to help them later in life by working together and developing literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills. In spite of the school's best efforts, including immediate follow-up when pupils are absent, attendance rates are below the national average.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Pupils make good progress in their learning because teaching is consistently good throughout the school. Some teaching is outstanding, for example, in Reception and Year 2. Teachers have high expectations and make every effort to ensure lessons are fun. As a result pupils enjoy learning. Thorough planning, which caters for the needs of all abilities, means that pupils are challenged effectively. A brisk pace, especially in mathematics lessons, keeps pupils on their toes! Pupils are encouraged to talk their ideas through with each other. The use of 'talking partners' is a very successful feature in many lessons because it ensures that all pupils participate fully and become confident learners. Teaching assistants play a key role in supporting learning for all abilities and are a significant factor in enabling pupils to achieve well.

How well pupils are progressing in English, mathematics and science is carefully tracked. Teachers are good at using this information to help them modify the curriculum. Some marking, especially in literacy, is beginning to show pupils how they can improve their work. However, this is not consistent in other subjects. Assessment in foundation subjects is at an early stage of development.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The good curriculum fulfils statutory requirements and promotes learning well. Provision for Reception is outstanding. Throughout the school pupils are responding positively to recent initiatives in literacy to improve reading and in grouping by ability for English and mathematics. Groups are regularly reviewed to ensure that all pupils are provided with the right level of challenge and this is proving effective in raising standards.

The exciting way in which art and drama are used enriches most subjects. History was brought alive for pupils when an adult dressed as Queen Victoria 'visited'. Outside visits and visitors are a regular feature, making good links across subjects. Partnerships with other schools and outside agencies provide very good opportunities for sport, such as the breakfast gym club. This and the Healthy Schools initiative promote pupils' understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle. Whole-school events such as 'International Arts Week' make a significant contribution to multicultural awareness, enabling the school to fulfil its aim of 'allowing children to meet difference with respect'. Improving opportunities for pupils to develop skills in terms of their economic well-being would make the overall curriculum even better.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils are cared for and supported well. The school has effective procedures in place for children joining the school. This, together with the care and support given by staff, ensures that children in Reception settle quickly into school routines. Any pupils requiring additional help are identified early and effective measures are put in place to support them. Excellent use is made of outside agencies when required, enabling these pupils to make good progress. The school's personal, social, health and citizenship education programme is effective in helping pupils to care for and support each other. Child protection arrangements meet statutory requirements. The nominated child protection officer is adequately trained and staff are regularly updated on procedures to ensure that pupils are protected and secure. The school is a safe place with very little bullying. Pupils are confident to approach adults with any problems or worries. The caretaker and all staff help to create a safe working environment. Risk assessment is in place for all visits.

Good assessment procedures enable teachers to plan the curriculum. However, guidance for pupils does not give them enough information about what they can do to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good and have positive effects on pupils' learning. The contribution of the head is outstanding. Her drive, management skills and very effective monitoring ensure that staff are a very good team, committed to helping pupils make progress. The work of curriculum coordinators was criticised in the last

report. Staff training, better subject planning and much-improved monitoring of teaching and learning have successfully addressed this. Subject leadership is now good with outstanding features, notably in literacy, numeracy and in Reception. As a result pupils are extremely effectively included in all activities. They are achieving well and standards are rising. The management of assessment, to show pupils how to improve, is an area for further development.

School self-evaluation has improved and is now outstanding.. The head and senior leaders make very successful use of contributions from staff, governors and parents to review how the school is doing and to plan what will make a difference. Introducing ability groupings and a new structure to develop how the curriculum is planned and monitored are excellent examples of innovation. The school's proven track record shows it has a very healthy capacity for further development.

Governors have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for further improvement. They monitor the budget well and are prepared to challenge as well as support. Good governance ensures the school is efficiently run. Links with parents and outside agencies are exemplary. Parents are extremely confident in the school, especially in the head, the quality of teaching, and the ways in which personal, as well as academic, development are encouraged. "I wouldn't want my child to go anywhere else!" said one. This view is shared by many others.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	1	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	4	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	1	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Your excellent behaviour and smiling faces showed us how much you like your school. We are very grateful for your warm welcome and the eager way you told us about Ad Astra. We can see how working with your 'talking partners' has helped you to talk sensibly. This is what adults call 'communicating well'.

We really enjoyed our visit. Here are some of the highlights we found.

- You get off to an excellent start in Reception and make good progress throughout the school because there is a good curriculum and teaching is good.
- Being in groups for literacy and numeracy really helps your learning.
- The school is well run and staff take good care of you.

In order to make the school even better we have asked teachers to find more ways to discover how you are getting on. Setting targets for each of you will help you understand how you can make your work even better.

The school's attendance rates are below most other schools. This is because some children go on holiday in school time. We know sometimes this cannot be helped but every day you are away means you miss things which can be hard to catch up on.

Ad Astra is a good school and your parents are right to be very pleased with it. We hope you will continue to enjoy it.